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House Okays Bill Cosponsored by Rep. Bacchiochi that Could Help Stafford

A measure (House Bill 6499) cosponsored by state Representative Penny Bacchiochi, R-52nd District, that would enable communities like Stafford that are no longer eligible for the Small Town Economic Assistance Program (STEAP) to continue qualifying for STEAP grants was approved today by the state House of Representatives.

"Although small towns that no longer qualify for STEAP grants can still apply for state Urban Act grants, the eligibility criteria for Urban Act grants are weighted more toward developed, economically distressed municipalities, which has made it very difficult for rural towns like Stafford to compete successfully against more urbanized communities," Representative Bacchiochi said.

"While Stafford suffers from many of the same social and economic problems common to small cities like Willimantic, it has so far been unable to secure an Urban Act grant because of its competitive disadvantage," Representative Bacchiochi said. "Stafford is still a small town and should be able to qualify for a STEAP grant. If enacted, this bill will correct that inequity."

The legislation now goes to the State Senate for final legislative approval.

Under current law, towns are eligible for STEAP grants if they have fewer than 30,000 people, do not have state-designated urban centers, and have not been designated by the state as "distressed municipalities" or "public investment communities" (PIC).

A town loses its eligibility for STEAP grants when its population exceeds the threshold or is designated as a distressed municipality or PIC. Towns receiving those designations then become eligible for Urban Act grants.

The bill would apply to towns that become ineligible for STEAP grants after the state designates them as public investment communities.

Urban Act and STEAP grants fund housing, transportation, economic development, environmental protection, and social service projects.